IMPROVING SECURITY AT YOUR CONSTRUCTION SITE

MAKE JOB SITE SECURITY A JOINT VENTURE

Ideally, the general contractor and subcontractors should share responsibility for initiation and funding of a good vandalism and theft prevention program since each has exposure to substantial loss. The subcontractor is normally not in a position to stipulate what security safeguards are necessary for the protection of his equipment unless an agreement has been made with the general contractor.

A good program can be developed in the early stages of the construction project, which will involve both in sharing the cost and responsibility.

SPEAK OUT ON THEFT!

“Everybody is doing it. The company doesn’t seem to mind.” That’s likely to be the rationale for theft, even among usually honest employees, when an employer doesn’t clearly state opposition to theft and act to prevent it. You may assume employees know you oppose theft, but they may believe you don’t care if you don’t take specific anti-theft steps. Consider the following:

- Conduct meetings and give handout materials to let employees know you expect honesty on the job site.
- Explain your policy on the “gray areas” taking scrap lumber or cut-off pipes, personal use of company vehicles or “borrowing” tools for overnight or weekend use.
- Ask employees to report theft to management via a phone number that they can use after hours and on weekends.

Many would-be thieves will be deterred by the knowledge that someone can turn them in anonymously. But before acting on anonymous tips, discuss the case with your lawyer.

ENCOURAGE SECURITY SUGGESTIONS FROM YOUR EMPLOYEES

Employees can play a vital part in reducing losses of small tools and materials by constant surveillance of your job site. In preventing vandalism and theft, they can work with you as well as work for you.

Many small day-to-day losses must be paid from profits. Don’t be afraid to let your workers know that they could be fired if they are caught stealing. Most labor contracts contain a clause listing dishonesty as one of the just causes for which you may fire an employee. Prosecute those who steal to let other employees know that you mean business.
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INVOLVE NEIGHBORS IN WATCHING YOUR JOB SITE

Neighbors and their children can become efficient watchdogs of your project during evening hours and on weekends if you solicit their help in a friendly way. Contact neighbors in the immediate area around your job site. Don’t overemphasize your concern about stopping crimes. Stress the ways you are promoting safety so their children won’t be tempted to play in the area and get hurt. While they may be sympathetic to your security problems, your neighbors are also interested in your efforts to ensure their safety.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SAFEGUARDING YOUR JOB SITE

Organize Your Storage Area
A well-organized storage area on the job site should include the following:

- An efficient receiving area that confines material to a specific area.
- A security fence, at least eight feet in height, enclosing the entire storage area.
- Lighting after daylight hours. Watchmen should also be considered.

Mark Equipment
One of the first things thieves do after they steal equipment is to remove the plate on which the manufacturer has listed the model and serial number. Even if you are absolutely certain the machine belongs to you, positive proof is a legal requirement to reclaim it. Keep written records of all vehicle identification numbers on equipment, and keep a color photo of each unit. Maintain an accurate inventory.

Use a hardened steel punch or etching tool to duplicate the serial numbers in at least two places, one obvious and one hidden. Record the locations and the numbers. Post warning notices on machines advising that all VINs have been recorded. If your equipment is stolen and recovered in another town or state, police can trace ownership back to you and you can make positive identification.

Consider painting equipment a different color to aid in identification. Mark the tops of cabs or ROPS to aid in aerial identification. Immobilize equipment by removing the rotor or lowering the blade or bucket. Remove the battery and electric starting system, particularly when equipment is not used daily. Install anti-theft devices such as fuel cutoffs, hydraulic bypasses, track locks, hydraulic arm locks etc.
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A good inventory control, with a “check in and out” system for tools issued to employees could save your project from excessive losses. Not all thefts are from the outside. Permanently mark company tools and keep a record to whom they are issued. Lock gang boxes and supply sheds at all times.

Prevent arguments over who owns a tool or piece of equipment by making available inexpensive die stamps or etching tools to employees so they can mark their own identification on personal property.

Use Fences to Control Losses and Prevent Accidents
Pay special attention to the fences on your job site. They can be purchased or, in some areas, leased as needed. Fencing around the entire site or around storage areas and trailers will help control entrances and exits from the area. Fencing focuses all access through one or two points, making control easier. Limit the number of gates and keep them guarded or locked when not in use. Remember, thieves and vandals with minimal risk can easily scale a fence without strands of barbed wire. On highway construction, fencing may be practical only around job site trailers, storage sheds or compounds for equipment and supplies. Equipment that cannot be fenced should be disabled at night and on weekends. Removing keys is not enough. Switch jumping is as easy on equipment as it is on automobiles. From a liability and safety standpoint, all hazardous materials (poisons, solvents, flammables and explosives) should always be fenced.

Although some protective fencing, such as that used on a downtown construction site, is made of plywood, it is wise to consider the use of an occasional section of chain-link fencing. This not only provides a better opportunity for surveillance at off-duty hours by security patrols and police, but also offers a view of your construction project to the general public.

Fenced-in areas should be “flushed” at the close of the workday to make sure no unauthorized vehicles remain to be used later for removing tools, equipment or supplies.

Post signs warning outsiders of security guards, watch dogs and alarms. Use signs and decals on equipment to offer rewards for information leading to the arrest of thieves or vandals. All construction property, whether it is fenced or not, should have adequate signs with lettering large enough to be read at a distance. These should be posted at gates and on all sides of the job site. Signs that give warning or
information about any marking of equipment with identification numbers will deter thieves and discourage vandalism.

 locks, such as those having changeable combinations, may be the answer. To prevent unauthorized duplication, “plug” keys with a rivet through the bow as a means of preventing alignment needed for machined duplication.

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Secure Tools and Equipment
Make sure storage sheds or fenced areas are used to properly secure all tools and equipment. Keep cabs on all vehicles locked and remove ignition keys when not in use. Use metal shields on equipment windows where practical, and lock oil and gas tank caps. Disable machines with hidden ignition cutout switches. Most losses are directly traced to carelessness by employees

Release Keys to Supervisory Personnel
Controlling keys is an essential element of limiting access to designated areas. Key issuance must always be based on actual continuing need and not on convenience. Limit the number of persons to whom responsibility of “key control” is given. Keep an up-to-date log listing the type of key issued, to whom, on what date and for what purposes. Keep all un-issued keys under lock, and keep extra keys to a minimum. Change your locks periodically. Considering the potential losses involved, this simple act is well worth the time and money. Extra-security

Monitor the Receipt of Deliveries
A standard procedure for checking material on and off the job site should be established and followed. One person should be assigned to maintain a tight inventory control of all materials and tools delivered, signing for each delivery only after carefully checking the invoice for shortages. Critical material should not be stored on the job site any longer than necessary. Whenever possible, the delivery of high-value material or items known to be in critical demand should be timed on an “as needed” basis in conformance with your construction scheduling. Spot-check materials and equipment frequently, and do not allow empty cartons to accumulate, since they may be used to take supplies off the project. Supervise all trash removal so that valuable tools or materials cannot be hidden in containers and removed from the job site.

Make Lighting Work For You
Lighting as a crime deterrent is a priority in any plans to combat theft and vandalism. Adequate night lighting is also recognized as a significant deterrent to acts of “casual” or “impulse” crime.

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Prior to job start-up, temporary lighting should be in place and plans should be made to expand its coverage as the job progresses. Consider renting lighting systems if company-owned systems are not available.

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Regardless of the fixtures used, the office trailer, material storage yard and equipment storage area should be illuminated. Critical areas should be visible from the most heavily traveled road bordering the site. A good lighting system can also be spotted during the daytime by would-be thieves who might be casing the area.

The small cost of overnight lighting is smart business since it tells law enforcement agencies that you want to help them protect your property and cut down crime in the area.

Floodlight the perimeter of areas where vehicles and equipment are stored. Direct lights so they do not blind security guards, police or the general public, and use enough lights to eliminate dark spots or shadows.

**REPORT THEFT AND VANDALISM PROMPTLY**

No matter how small the loss from theft or vandalism, report all incidents to law enforcement officials. The information you supply to them promptly may save your job from a repeat visit or discourage the vandals or thieves from striking other construction projects.

Accurate information will accelerate the possible recovery of your equipment or apprehension of vandals. Make sure your company has an effective incident report form and a complete record of model and serial numbers of all equipment assigned to your project. Also, keep in mind that accurate and timely notification of loss must be made to your Insurance Company’s Claims Department.